

**BEFORE THE OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE HOUSE ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE**

My name is Kurt Eichenwald and I am a senior writer with the New York Times. This marks the second time I have been subpoenaed to testify before this subcommittee about my reporting on the dangers to children from adult predators online. As someone who has emerged as an unlikely chronicler of this threat, I recognize that my testimony can assist in your search for legislative solutions. But, as in my April testimony, I would caution that, while I am able to inform you of the published findings of my investigations, I do not believe it is my place – nor do I believe I am qualified – to offer policy prescriptions.

My reporting on Internet predators began in June 2005, with my discovery of Justin Berry, the young man who testified before the subcommittee in April about his experience of being lured into webcam child pornography at the age of 13. At the time of that hearing, I was in the first days of a new investigative effort observing online conversations among pedophiles, beginning with those conducted on communication sites first identified to me by Justin. In the months that followed, I discovered an array of places on the Internet where pedophiles gathered to swap stories, experiences and tips. These conversations seemed to reflect a belief among pedophiles either that no one outside their community was watching or that no one could locate them; many readily admitted committing crimes or contemplating them.

I remained immersed in these conversations for four months. At no time did I participate, to insure that my presence did not affect the direction of the discussions. Throughout this period of reporting, I observed hundreds of conversations, ultimately recording the pedophiles' world and beliefs, told through their own words. This

investigation resulted in a two-part series published last month on the front-page of the Times. I have submitted those articles to the committee as an exhibit.

What I discovered was terrible. The online conversation sites – even those ostensibly set up to provide support to adults wrestling with their sexual attraction to children – proved to be a means for pedophiles to gain knowledge and assistance in making contact with minors in the real world. But they also were part of an infrastructure established by pedophiles to rationalize and, often, celebrate their feelings and beliefs.

From the conversations, I learned of Internet radio stations and downloadable pod casts put together by pedophiles for other adults attracted to children; online jewelry stores that sold pendants identifying the wearer to those in the know as a pedophile; as well as an active social movement that purports to be pushing for the “rights” of children to engage in sexual contact with adults.

The rationalizations for molesting children are repeated in these discussions, endlessly, to the point that participants exhibit almost a delusional view of the world. They state repeatedly that sexual contact between adults and children is not only harmless, but beneficial, so long as it does not involve forcible rape. I have witnessed conversations where pedophiles justify the molestation of autistic children under the age of 10, of family members, and even of infants.

Adults who attempt to protect children from molestation by pedophiles are deemed “child haters.” Meanwhile parents and other adults in children’s lives are dismissed as impediments to the minors’ happiness. Many times, conversation participants discuss their own past crimes involving children and their resulting imprisonment, speaking of their sentences as reflecting nothing more than the heavy-hand

of an authoritarian society. In one instance, when a pedophile voiced regret for molesting a child, he was assailed as a traitor to the cause who had been brainwashed by society.

Observing these conversations provided many disturbing moments. Pedophiles would come online every day with stories of the children they had just seen. Many of them were teachers and school administrators, describing children under their control. Others were pediatricians, talking about the delight they experienced during their latest physical exam of a child. There were even fathers who discussed their own children in sexual terms, including one who graphically described watching his two young sons as they changed in a locker room. To help the committee better understand these types of comments, I have attached one recent posting by a man who describes himself as a newly-trained kindergarten teacher, who discusses his desires to engage in sex with the little girls in his care. It is my hope that, by making this posting public, someone may recognize the events described by this individual, and stop him before it is too late.

The innocent acts of childhood were often interpreted by the pedophiles as sexual come-ons by pre-pubescent children. A second grader holding his crotch at school did not need to go to the bathroom, one of the pedophiles wrote; he was instead signaling his eagerness to engage in sex. Pedophiles were convinced that children who sat with their legs apart were purposely trying to tempt them. And one man described in detail watching a girl on a playground whom he was convinced was trying to lure him into sex. The reason? When she did cartwheels in her skirt, he could see her panties.

What amazed me about these discussions was the sense among the participants that they were fighting a battle for their beliefs that they fully anticipated would extend for years – perhaps decades – into the future. As such, they did not expect to reach the

world they seek – where child pornography was lawful and age of consent laws were a thing of the past – anytime soon. Instead, they knew they had to move gradually, seeking small victories – some of which came to pass.

For example, I saw pedophiles online argue that they should support exemptions to the child pornography laws for researchers and journalists as a first step toward legalization. That, of course, could not be argued publicly – instead, they urged that this effort should be draped in the cloth of independent skepticism, by arguing that reporters and academics should be allowed to challenge government interpretations of what kinds of images merit prosecution. The irrationality of the argument is obvious – no one needs to surf the Internet seeking child pornography to challenge whether a particular individual should be charged for possessing a particular image. All such a proposal would do is open up the floodgates to the lawful trafficking in illicit images among self-proclaimed journalists and researchers. And yet, in recent weeks, I have seen reputable publications hold up this argument as worthy of consideration. Let me assure you; no one in my profession needs the laws changed to do their jobs. I have accomplished my work over the past year while steadfastly following the rules. Also, from my experience, more than enough information emerges from criminal trials to allow anyone to challenge the standards used by the government in deeming a particular image as child pornography.

The pedophiles also celebrated something called model sites, which I learned were the explosive trend last year in child pornography. By clicking on one of the many web addresses posted in a discussion where no illegal sites were supposed to be linked, I ultimately found myself confronted by a page of images of pre-pubescent little girls wearing virtually nothing, posed in seductive ways to meet the requests of pedophile

subscribers. Given the nature of that site, as the law dictates, I immediately reported what I found to the authorities. That site – which boldly and, I believe, falsely, proclaimed itself legal – was run by a company called Playtoy Enterprises. Playtoy attracted 6,000 members in six months, all of whom paid \$30 a month processed by credit card companies and online payment systems. Since publication of my articles, I have heard that Playtoy closed. But I discovered hundreds of such sites advertised on marketing portals for pedophiles; I am sure that many of them are still around, photographing little girls every week and posting their images for the entertainment of pedophiles.

Issues related to child pornography were frequent topics of conversation, including repeated advice from pedophiles about how to trade images without attracting the attention of law enforcement. I have attached a posting from a pedophile providing details of how savvy porn traders use technology to evade detection. This person is so certain he can't be caught that he even posted his entire hard-drive directory of child porn videos – more than 100 gigabytes worth. Included in those, based on the description, were videos of a child porn victim who already testified before this subcommittee. This posting makes clear that the pedophiles understand how law enforcement is restricted in its investigative tactics, and have used that knowledge to their advantage.

My four months of observing the pedophile conversations were nothing short of horrific. But they served to prove to me the importance, not only of this kind of reporting, but also of this committee's work to help insure the safety of our children.

Thank you.